

**Jouissance and Sinthome:
Writing Sex and Body in Contemporary Taiwan Poetry**

YANG Xiaobin

Writing sex and body in contemporary Taiwan poetry is so important that such prominent scholars as Jiao Tong, Chen Yizhi, Zheng Huiru and Xiao Xiao, among others, have all discussed poetic eroticism at length. The title of this paper, however, avoids the term "erotic" for examining this issue from a different angle. If the study of poetic eroticism largely emphasizes emancipation and revolution, my argument tends toward the complex psychic mechanism in the poetic representations of sex and body, as well as the cultural connotations that can be observed from psychoanalytic perspective. I will try to avoid the purely "positive" and beautified aspect of poetic eroticism so as to probe the dialectical significance of enjoyment in the poetic writing of sex and body. Here, Jacques Lacan's theory of jouissance has much to say about this issue. This paper will analyze, from Lacanian perspective, various expressions of jouissance in Chen Li, Jiao Tong, Jiang Wenyu, Xia Yu, Chen Kehua, Yan Ailin, and Tang Juan, to develop and deepen the understanding of poetic "eroticism" today. Rather than simply affirm its emancipatory and rebellious function, my study of poetic writing of sex and body attempts to reveal the multiple dimensions of jouissance, especially phallic jouissance. This essay, therefore, focuses on the various relationships between jouissance (enjoyment) and pain, jouissance and desire, phallic jouissance and feminine jouissance, jouissance and language, and between jouissance and symptom (sinthome).

Chen Kehua and Jiao Tong: Phallic Jouissance between Transgression and Allegory

Mainland China saw the rise of writing about "lower body" in the end of the last century, while such theme was no longer fresh in Taiwan, though there are significant differences between the two sides. From the 1980s to the 21st century, Chen Kehua's poetry, as Xiao Xiao points out, often reflects "the cultural phenomenon of primitive phallus fetish and the pursuit for direct sensual enjoyment," demonstrating the "attempt to deconstruct authority and subvert the center"¹. As early as 1986, Chen Kehua's poem "I Found a Head" explored the "partial objects" (marked by body organs) whose primacy rests in their dismissal of the possibility of combination and coordination. The partial object is what Lacan calls *objet petit a* (abbreviated as *a*),

¹ Xiao Xiao, "Xiandaishi de qingse meixue yu xingai miaoxie" *Taiwan shixue jikan* 9, p.22.

which constitute the matheme of fantasy along with the split subject (\mathcal{S}): $\mathcal{S} \langle \rangle a$. It is the drive that surrounds the *objet petit a* without true interest in reaching it, only repeating its obsession with the Real jouissance. The obsession with the series of partial objects in this poem comes from the drive circling around them, and is expressed in the manifestation of the independent operations of these organs. The whole poem records all the unsettling organ parts the "I" found along the road: fingers, breasts, penis, head, heart..., whereas these parts are connected, in the poem, with other parts such as lips, groin, abdomen, pupil, eyes, muscle, eye tuck, forehead, cheek, skull, etc. In the poem, the found penis is "abrupt / erecting hugely at the horizon / the fallow center"², just as the jar placed on top of everything in Wallace Stevens' poem, yet full of vitality. If, according to Lacan, phallic jouissance is masturbatory, Chen Kehua presents the absolute, pure phallic jouissance, as if the phallic object found on the road is the one abandoned after castration, a symbol of the forbidden enjoyment. Such jouissance belongs exactly to the Real, shown as a symptom of trauma, an enjoyment emerging from pain. Even though "the distant opened groin is looming toward me / and pinching tightly the tremble and excitement / of the whole century"³, and the "fountain of the whale body"⁴ also simulates the form of ejaculation, the picture here is illusory and masturbatory, lacking actual object of desire (let alone the subject itself shown as partial object). In this poem, therefore, the tragic quality of the partial objects is comically portrayed. These items scatter on the ground, displaying a post-catastrophic landscape. Each of them is uselessly vital, without the possibility of being reunited into an organic whole. Jouissance thus becomes the impossibility of jouissance, as the partial objects are cut off from their integrative entirety, and the symbolic phallus is blocked from its object of desire.

Likewise, Chen Kehua's "Ode to Muscle" lists twenty names of muscles, such as biceps brachii muscle, soleus muscle, quadriceps femoris muscle, pectoralis major muscle, musculus constrictor vaginae, etc., along with different kinds of common phrases almost by chance. Jiao Tong correctly point out that, in this poem, "each muscle's expression parodies different kind of advertisement, fashionable word, or slogan, and directly satirizes and criticizes the targets – the lies, all grandiose, moral, national... lies"⁵. Indeed, these common words include not only individually-concerned, but also publicly- and even politically-oriented, idioms:

² Chen Kehua, *Wo jian dao yige toulou* (I Found a Head) (Taipei: Hanguang, 1988), 10.

³ Chen Kehua, *Wo jian dao yige toulou* (I Found a Head) (Taipei: Hanguang, 1988), 11.

⁴ Chen Kehua, *Wo jian dao yige toulou* (I Found a Head) (Taipei: Hanguang, 1988), 11.

⁵ Jiao Tong, "Shenti zhengbazhan: Shilun qingseshi de huayu celtie," in Lin Shuifu and Lin Yaode eds., *Leisi yu bianzi de jiaohuan: Dangdai Taiwan qingse wenxue lun* (Taipei: Shibao chuban, 1997), 222.

Orbicularis oculi muscle. Our motherland's landscape is so splendid.

Gastrocnemius muscle. Happy? Very perfect.

Superior oblique muscle. The correct lovemaking gesture.⁶

If "orbicularis oculi muscle" as part of the eye is somewhat related to the splendid landscape, the relationship between "gastrocnemius muscle" and happiness or between "superior oblique muscle" and lovemaking is disconnected. The muscles as partial objects are no longer source of vitality, but supplanted into the jungle of empty and disordered formulaic discourses (even the lovemaking utterances are mechanical). Here, the organic parts are in conflict with the discursive law, bringing possible enjoyment into the function of transgression on the background of law. As Lacan states: "Transgression in the direction of *jouissance* only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law"⁷. In other words, it is exactly the repression of the formulaic discourses that strengthens the seductive force of the vigorous muscles as partial objects, which transgress the discursive barriers to reach *jouissance*. In this sense, Lacan reiterates St. Paul's assertion that "[s]in needed the Law,... so that he could become a great sinner" and thus emphasizes "the tight bond between desire and the Law"⁸. If it is the Law that appeals to the transgressive desire directed toward *jouissance*, in this poem, then, the various empty discourses in daily life entail the fragmentary world of muscles that disturbs regularity and ignores rules. Toward the end, the currents of grand discourses merge into the nihilistic turbulence:

Masticatory muscle. Fist, pillow, nipple.

Retractor muscle. You never feel meaningless?

Triceps muscle. Damn the meaningless.⁹

It seems that, under the repeated call for the bodily *jouissance*, discourse of the law withdraws and is replaced by cynical but equally empty articulation. In Chen Kehua, *jouissance* has no utopian effect, and the transgressive subversion only reaches the emptiness of satisfaction per se. Obviously, the muscles are unable to reintegrate into organic whole but merely display themselves absurdly, marking the painful dimension of *jouissance*.

We can perceive that, in Chen Kehua's poems – including those notorious for their blatant obscenity, such as "Shut up Your Libia Minora" and "The Necessity of Anal

⁶ Chen Kehua, *Qian kantou shi* (Taipei: Jiuge), 41.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960* (New York, Norton, 1992), p. 177.

⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960* (New York, Norton, 1992), p. 177.

⁹ Chen Kehua, *Qian kantou shi* (Taipei: Jiuge), 41.

Sex" – sexual jouissance appears with both satisfactory and painful implications. The word "fuck" is used to connect violence and enjoyment in the grand discourses: "Let me say in Caesar's voice: / I came, I saw, I fucked"¹⁰ ("Shut up Your Libia Minora") or "Fuck, fuck, fuck fuck, fuck / My country, my family / Long, long fuck my people"¹¹ ("No Condom, OK?"). Here, sexual behavior replaces possible lofty diction to imply, in a different way, the enjoyment, pain, vulgarity and obscenity in political ideology. Although Jiao Tong correctly remarks that Chen Kehua's poetry "challenges the morally forbidden zone, opposes morality with immorality and oppose nobility with indecency,"¹² and that "the alternative passion is basically a discursive strategy – marginal discourse resisting the mainstream discourse,"¹³ I still tend not to regard Chen Kehua's sexually explicit writing as merely a subversive expression. I would like to argue that the obscene strategy of Chen Kehua is a double-bladed sword: it both expresses the inconformity and transgression of (unconventional) sexual behavior, and at the same time exposes its arbitrariness, rudeness, vulgarity and perversion. Chen Kehua demonstrates undecorated, primitive, fragmented organ parts and their events to probe the unfathomable mental abyss in the Real.

In this sense, Zheng Huiru's observation on Chen Kehua's poetry is illuminating. She asserts that, in Chen Kehua, "the goal of obscenity is to awaken the deep awkwardness in life, including such wordless moment as death. ... On the surface, the poet displays literal elements meticulously and exposes full sensual images, but ultimately he conveys setbacks. The more uncontrolled and offensive his style is, the more strongly he writes lack and regret of life."¹⁴ The strength of Chen Kehua's writing, then, lies in its thorough manifestation of the irresistibility of the drive. It may need to be emphasized that the drive, as death drive, is not dashing toward destruction but moving repetitively and absurdly around the partial object. In Žižek's words, "the death drive is not the pre-subjective noumenal Real itself, but the impossible moment of the 'birth of subjectivity', of the negative gesture of contraction/withdrawal that replaces reality with *membra disjecta*, with the series of organs as standings for the 'immortal' libido."¹⁵ The organs in Chen Kehua's poems – the viscera scattered on the road and the muscles listed throughout the verses – all lead to the death drive that only move around the void without being able to fill in

¹⁰ Chen Kehua, *Qian kantou shi* (Taipei: Jiuge), 61.

¹¹ Chen Kehua, *Meili shensui de Yaxiya* (Taipei: Shulin, 1997), 114.

¹² Jiao Tong, "Shenti zhengbazhan: Shilun qingseshi de huayu celüe," in Lin Shuifu and Lin Yaode eds., *Leisi yu bianzi de jiaohuan: Dangdai Taiwan qingse wenxue lun* (Taipei: Shibao chuban, 1997), 223.

¹³ Jiao Tong, "Shenti zhengbazhan: Shilun qingseshi de huayu celüe," in Lin Shuifu and Lin Yaode eds., *Leisi yu bianzi de jiaohuan: Dangdai Taiwan qingse wenxue lun* (Taipei: Shibao chuban, 1997), 224.

¹⁴ Zheng Huiru, "Yijiujiuling niandai Taiwan shentishi de kongjian cengci," in Li Fengmao and Liu Yuanru eds., *Kongjian, diyu yu wenhua: Zhongguo wenhua kongjian de shuxie yu chanshi* (Taipei: Zhongyanyuan wenzhesuo, 2002), 490.

¹⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 52. Žižek's frequent example is from the Disney cartoon *Alice in Wonderland*, in which the Cheshire cat still grins and shivers in the air even after it is swallowed by the dark.

(what Zheng Huiru calls "lack and regret of life"). By way of actively experiencing the drive, Chen Kehua's poetry traverses the fantasy, i.e., "confronts the void, the gap, filled up by the fantasmatic object," not "the lost object" but "loss itself as an object."¹⁶

Undoubtedly, Jiao Tong's comment on Chen Kehua – "the revelation of the power of lie is realized by the body" – also applies to his own poetics. We can even aver that, compared to Chen Kehua, Jiao Tong, in his *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement*, more distinctly links phallic jouissance to symbolic politics. As Zhang Xiaohong remarks in her preface to this book, Jiao Tong "writes 'male potency enhancement' (*zhuangyang*) as 'striking the masculine' (*zhuangyang*) to challenge the authority."¹⁷ The goal of male potency enhancement is revealed as the grand expression in the realm of symbolic politics. Based on its phallic quality, jouissance is embodied in the organs that belong to the symbolic order, in the absurd movement of the drive. The poems and pseudo-recipes are titled by politically or sexually related idioms which, as signifiers (including master signifiers), constitute the logical starting point but lead to the impossibility of symbolization, i.e., the lack of the signifier of the Other. In Jiao Tong's poetry, then, the absurd movement of the drive is not merely displayed by the partial object of the organs, but performed by the obsessional signifiers, which represent the ideological function of phallic jouissance. As Žižek points out that "without this core of jouissance, ideology does not function."¹⁸ In "Work Hard Quietly," for example, the description of cooking requires is that "one must be brave enough to discard elements and display one's national spirit in punishing Han traitors" and "[w]hen cooking, one should behave as if engaging in a revolutionary struggle."¹⁹ Obviously, the persistent performance of such master signifiers as "national spirit" and "revolutionary struggle" during the time of cooking is exactly the reason why they keep haunting but never truly reach the destination. The phrase "work hard" is intentionally misused for sexual and political actions (but not sexual-political action): "Counterattack and resurgence / Madly make love—"²⁰ enables phallic jouissance to be full of symbolic meaning, even though enjoyment is lost due to the absurdity of such meaning. Thus, phallic jouissance exists in the space intersected by the Symbolic and the Real, by the linguistic order of the signifiers and the traumatic kernel where the signifiers cannot enter. Jiao Tong strives to show that between the Symbolic order and the Real trauma there is a fissure that indicates the

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), pp.327-328. The difference between "the lost object" and "loss itself as an object" is tantamount to what Žižek cites from Walter Benjamin – the difference between "constituted anxiety" and "constituent anxiety."

¹⁷ Jiao Tong, *Wanquan zhuangyang shipu* (Taipei: Eryu, 2004), 12.

¹⁸ Josefina Ayerza with Slavoj Žižek, "Hidden Prohibitions and the Pleasure Principle," *Flash Art* March/April 1992, p.70.

¹⁹ Jiang Tong, *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2000), 22-23.

²⁰ Jiang Tong, *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2000), 24.

pleasure in pain of jouissance.

In the poem “The Sun Rises from the East,” the description of the effect of the cocktail is as follows: “On the one hand, it will bring about earthshaking ambition. On the other hand, it will enhance the softness of one’s spine as well as the elasticity of one’s back muscle, which enables one to bend at a large angle at all times and immediately recover his unmatched hardness after the action.”²¹ Here, phallic jouissance I revealed by the oxymoronic rhetoric as an impossible fantasy: as “earthshaking ambition” and “unmatchable hardness” are muddled by “the elasticity of one’s back muscle” and “to bend at a large angle”, jouissance has become *jouis-sans*²² (without pleasure) – the opposite of enjoyment.

Under such a textual strategy, the symbolic politics based on phallic jouissance is self-disrupted and the grand ideological construct is imploded. The idea of male potency enhancement in Jiao Tong's poetry coincides with Lacan's theory of the phallus: the symbolic phallus Φ is not immune from its imaginary, castrated form $-\phi$. At the end of "An Erect Pillar," the erectile organ appears at times unpredictably capricious, at times in imminent danger of falling down:

Turns it to longer and longer
Transforms it into the Tokyo Tower;

Turns askew and askew,
Transform it into the leaning tower of Pisa.

The magician uses hallucination,
Uplifting and uplifting
Uplifts the Monuments of National Heroes;

Erecting and erecting
Erects the totem of the male.²³

Here, Jiao Tong uses “Turns it to longer and longer,” “Turns askew and askew,” “Uplifting and uplifting” and “Erecting and erecting” to imitate the exclamation when marveling at watching magic. We can imagine seeing the phallic symbol (without its own original pomposity) being stretched by some sort of magic, and then tilting

²¹ Jiang Tong, *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2000), 18.

²² The term “*jouis-sans*” is derived from Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 183-192.

²³ Jiang Tong, *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2000), 97-98.

toward collapse (near the state of castration), and finally being temporarily held up (the verb “uplift” 扶 is literally "hold," implying a senile object). The essential impotence of “the Monuments of National Heroes” or “the totem of the male” is thus revealed.

Likewise, in “Be Patient, No Rush,” the phallic symbol is simultaneously super potent, full of the magnificence of the political discourse – “The King Kong liquor produced by the Kimmen Winery is imbued with the memory of the August 23rd Artillery War and has absorbed the marrows of all kinds of huge cannons”²⁴ - and exposed of its comical weakness and cowardice – “when making this dish, one’s manner must be refined: as if trying to cover up a misdeed but to make it more conspicuous: as if trying to refuse the temptation but actually to embrace it”²⁵. The latter half of this poem caricaturizes the master signifiers with such expressions as “Oh oh oh, you massage me” or “Ah ah ah, you give me heat,” in which phallic jouissance is directly presented as idiotic jouissance. As phallic jouissance is termed by Lacan as "jouissance of the idiot,"²⁶ the entire text of Jiao Tong' *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement* is an ironic deconstruction of phallic jouissance.

Chen Li and Jiang Wenyu: *Lalangue* and Its Jouis-sens

If Chen Kehua and Jiao Tong are concerned with pure phallic jouissance in the space intersected by the Symbolic and the Real, Chen Li's poetry penetrates what Lacan calls *jouis-sens* (usually translated as enjoy-meant or jouis-sense), i.e., jouissance as meaning, the realm where the Imaginary and the Symbolic overlap. Lacan's term *lalangue* (usually translated as llanguage), a special linguistic form as a dynamic of *jouis-sens*, materializes desire in the signifier, conveying the unconscious jouissance and hinges the unconscious of desire onto language. As Žižek observes, *lalangue* "stands for language as the space of illicit pleasures that defy any normativity: the chaotic multitude of homonymies, word-plays, "irregular" metaphoric links and resonances."²⁷ Such "chaotic multitude of homonymies" appear in each line of Chen Li's poem "A Love Poem Keyed in with Wrong Words":

親礙的，我發誓對你終貞
我想念我們一起肚過的那些夜碗

²⁴ Jiang Tong, *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2000), 62.

²⁵ Jiang Tong, *Erotic Recipes: A Complete Menu for Male Potency Enhancement* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2000), 62-63.

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.81.

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, "Deleuze's Platonism: Ideas as Real", <<http://www.lacan.com/zizplato.htm>>.

那些充瞞喜悅、歡勒、揉情秘意的
牲華之夜
我想念我們一起淫詠過的那些濕歌
那些生雞勃勃的意象²⁸

My dare [dear], I swear that I love you for evil [ever].
I miss those wonderfool [wonderful] nights we spat [spent] together,
those subblind [sublimed] nights which are joyful,
gleetful [gleeful] and affected [affectionate].
I miss those wet [great] poems we read together,
those vivid and wicked [witty] images²⁹

Here, the transgressive function of *jouissance* lies in the fact that such healthy, graceful and solemn words as "dear," "forever," "spent," "witty," etc., have leapt out of the strict symbolic frame and transformed into grotesque, obscene and frivolous words. By way of returning to the chaotic, primitive sound compounds beyond the given language order, Chen Li opens up a verbal chasm between, and overlapped by, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. To some extent, we are indeed unable to suppress the grotesque, obscene and frivolous in the unconscious deep inside the healthy, graceful and solemn. In his 20th seminar, Lacan defines *lalangue* (llanguage) as language beyond the function of communication: "Llanguage erve purposes that are altogether different from that of communication. [...]But the unconscious is knowledge, a knowing how to do things with llanguage. And what we know how to do with llanguage goes well beyond what we can account for under the heading of language."³⁰ In other word, *lalangue* is undecipherable and illogical. In his "Ten Ways of Yuanjiao (Escorting)", Chen Li speaks *lalangue* again, seizing the special *jouis-sense* in the wordplay of pun, character-dissection or character-amalgamation. For example:

要口交，咬下去：要耳交
到郊外——他們用腳交，姿勢
怪，難度高，常常跌一跤³¹
(〈十種援乚一么的方式·跤〉)

²⁸ Chen Li, *Daoyu bianyuan* (Taipei: Huangguan, 1995), 121.

²⁹ See Chang Fen-ling's translation:

<<http://www.hgjh.hlc.edu.tw/~chenli/book6.htm#A%20Love%20Poem%20Keyed%20in%20with%20Wrong%20Words%20Because%20of%20Sleepiness>>

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.138-139.

³¹ Chen Li, *Qing/Man* (Taipei: Eryu, 2009), 90.

If oral sex (口交), bite (咬) it: if ear sex (耳交)
go to the suburb (郊[=交+耳]外) – they do foot sex (腳交), with odd
gesture and great difficulty, but often tumble (跌跤[=腳+交])
(my translation)

Here the character 跤 is split into 腳交, and the word 口交 is compressed into 咬, or 郊 is interpreted as 耳交. By playing with the original sonic/semantic logic and stretching it into the (il)logic of jouis-sense, Chen Li produces the result of creating Chinese characters from action. That is to say, *lalangue* becomes a mode of life, and a mode of experiencing life at the same time. This is the verbal reflection of the vagary flowed from the unconscious of the symbolic discourse, a vagary inseparable from the – possible or imaginary – bizarre mode of sexual behavior.

Similar unusual *lalangue* appears in female poet Jiang Wenyu's poems. In her shockingly explicit poems "You want Surprise (jingyi) and Semen (jingyi)" and "A Doggerel Read by Beepers", homophones become the fundamental source of jouis-sense:

As a woman's your attitude toward lovemaking is always surprise (jingyi)
To encourage and send to the battlefield his array semen (jingyi)
In the surging vagina floating sinking and overflowing (jingyi)
Where thousands of swollen and opening feather dusters erecting firmly (jingyi)

Painstakingly combating for the corner's hidden no-attention (jingyi)
The wet love mood and love fluid enslave the skilled fighter's quintessence (jingyi)³²
("You want Surprise and Semen")

Jiang Wenyu expresses, by way of *lalangue*, the female sexual experience as a wonderful journey which slides toward other (even invented) semantic realms through homophonic channel.³³ All the different *jingyis* are aligned at the ends of all lines, undergoing metamorphosis of the symbolic order in the ever-changing meaning of language. *Lalangue* is both a chaos of the all-encompassing language and the hole or fissure of language, that is to say, language is the inner crack of the whole of language. To Lacan, the whole is a hole, indicating the non-all of the level of language. In his later phase, Lacan finds "something in woman as the not-all"³⁴: the woman is never

³² Jiang Wenyu, *Nanren de rutou* (Taipei: Yuanzun, 1998), 25.

³³ Lacan, when explaining *lalangue*, takes "jamais j'âmais" as an example of innovative. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.84.

³⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*,

impossible to be so in all, but always contains concealed inner mystery. Such mystery is hidden in the potential side of the language in Jiang Wenyu's poetry:

The first B lies on its back, 𠃉, being the structure of my breasts

The second B lies on its stomach, 𠃊, being the frame of your chest muscle

A B-B-call beeper is the dual 𠃋 lying down calling each other

Our breaths calling each other

And there is also a bloated and transformed B (pussy), pulsating with beep-beep³⁵

("A Doggerel Read by Beepers")

Here, just as Lacan says, "language, first of all, doesn't exist. Language is what we try to know concerning the function of language... the speaking being... provides the occasion to realize just how far the effects of language go"³⁶. In her comment on the above Lacan's words, Suzanne Barnard elucidates: "Lacan understands language—as the (m)Other tongue—to be the language of the being that ex-sists in Other jouissance. This jouissance can be heard in the 'body' of language—the letter of the body—just as it was first heard in the tone and rhythm of the mother('s) tongue."³⁷ Such "'body' of language—the letter of the body" appears amply in Jiang Wenyu's poem, not just because Jiang Wenyu is a linguist specializing in phonetics, but more because she expresses the experienced enjoyment in the mode of *lalangue*, that is, of jouissance that ex-sists in the subject, as a necessary quality of the female body.

Xia Yu and Yan Ailin: Desire, Feminine Jouissance and Jouissance of the Barred Other

Xia Yu's poetry touches on the subject of sex and body from various facets, even though this is not the main theme of her oeuvre. Concerning the body, Xia Yu, unlike Jiang Wenyu, does not present the body of jousis-sense by writing about genitals straightforwardly. Having shed the obsession with the master signifier in phallic jouissance, Xia Yu's poetry presents a disseminated, transformative erotic body. In many cases, Xia Yu does not accomplish jouissance directly but shows, with a seductive manner, the unreachable distance of jouissance, as in this poem "Fauves," a

1972-1973, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.34.

³⁵ Jiang Wenyu, *Nanren de rutou* (Taipei: Yuanzun, 1998), 26.

³⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.138-139.

³⁷ Suzanne Barnard, "Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance," in Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink, eds., *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p.184.

poem remarked by critic as “affirming the status of woman with female physiological phenomena and showing the independence, autonomy and awakening of female subjectivity”³⁸.

twenty-year-old breasts like two animals after prolonged slumber
awakening showing the pink tips of their noses
exploring yawning looking around for something to eat just as before
they’ll keep on growing up keep on
growing up growing
up³⁹

In this poem, the awakening of female body is metaphorized as “after prolonged slumber / awakening,” and breasts as “two animals” to reinforce the feeling of freedom and movement of the body. But the emancipation of the breasts does not mean simple attainment of *jouissance*, which is even never achieved. To describe the noses (metaphor of nipples) as “pink” is not just to describe simply somatic liveliness but actually to entail the next line—“exploring yawning looking around for something to eat.” First, an unsatisfactory manner of desire is constructed – “exploring” – to keep the status of incompleteness. Even “yawning” visually exhibits an empty, unfilled mouth. Nothing is achieved despite the action of “exploring” and nothing found despite the action of “looking around for something to eat,” which there is only the body parts that “keep on growing up keep on / growing up growing / up.” The emphasis of the (dis)continuity of growing has thus dual connotations: deferral, endless extension on the one hand, and caesura, gap (enjambment: “keep on / growing up growing / up”) which opens up a space of pure sliding desire on the other. The secret of Xia Yu’s poetry seems to be the continuous development of the desiring mode. Even the potential *jouissance* of the breasts’ growing is made to imply the absence of finish by repetition of the word “growing.”

Even if when portraying sexual action, as in "Certain Pas de Deux," Xia Yu invents a lovemaking scene far from ideal and emancipatory coitus of bodies:

he sways nonchalantly above cha cha cha
to prolong so-called “Time” cha cha
my wavering Shaker
she sweetly says she likes this game cha cha cha

³⁸ Zhang Huijia, “Lun Xia Yu shizhong de xiuci celue ji nüxing shuxie,” *Taiwan shixue xuekan* 3, 182.

³⁹ Michelle Yeh and N. G. D. Malmqvist, *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 411.

she likes it so much cha cha⁴⁰

In this lovemaking scene, the man on top is described as “sways nonchalantly,” or, neither caring about the feeling of the woman nor devoted to the sexual intercourse/interaction, but only obsessed with prolonging time to prove his sexual prowess (as “impotence [is] much harder for him to bear,”⁴¹ according to Lacan). Paradoxically, the woman on the bottom is not affected with her experience of “feminine jouissance” – she “likes this game” and “likes it so much”. This situation embodies Lacan's theorem “there is no sexual relationship” – or rather, the ways of symbolic inscription in female and male sexes are displaced, and the perfect concordance of the sexual union is an unachievable illusion. As Lacan remarks, “Phallic jouissance is the obstacle owing to which man does not come (*n'arrive pas*), I would say, to enjoy woman's body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ.”⁴² This is why “he sways nonchalantly above,” immersed in the fascination in his own organ. But feminine jouissance does not rely on phallic signifier, because it is creative: it does not “know,” but produce being on her own⁴³.

Lacan considers feminine jouissance “requir[ing] no relation to the phallus” and, as Bruce Fink remarks, is related “to religious ecstasy and to a kind of bodily, corporal jouissance that is not localized in the genitals the way phallic jouissance is”⁴⁴. His oft-quoted description of feminine jouissance, therefore, approaches religious experience: “you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she's coming. There's no doubt about it. What is she getting off on? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it.”⁴⁵ In “Certain Pas de Deux,” no matter how the man swings, the woman experiences only a kind of shaking religion⁴⁶, and calls her partner “shaker” (*zhendangjiaotu*). The Shakers, whose official name is the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, is a Christian sect emerging from England in the 18th century. Though the sect is nearly extinct, its musical and dancing tradition is still memorable. Lin Qingxuan, a popular essayist, once describes, “the believers always worship with body tremble, ...and obtain peace in mind with

⁴⁰ Julia C. Lin and Nicholas Kaldis eds., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Women's Poetry: An Anthology* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 192. Translation modified.

⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 583.

⁴² Jacques Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.7.

⁴³ Suzanne Barnard, “Tongues of Angels: Feminine Structure and Other Jouissance,” in Barnard Suzanne and Bruce Fink eds., *Reading Seminar XX, Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and. Feminine Sexuality*, (Albany: State University Press, 2002), p. 184.

⁴⁴ Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.120.

⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, 1972-1973*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.76.

⁴⁶ In his analysis of this poem, Chen Yizhi regards “the Shaker's cha cha” as (female) “individual and private fantasy”(Chen Yizhi, “Mengxiang daoyou lun Xia Yu,” *Dangdai shixue* 2, p.164.

passionate shaking dance. ...There is an unspeakable beauty due to the dance of soul and body together."⁴⁷ We can even say that the woman in "Certain Pas de Deux" transform the phallic jouissance (shaking), which focuses on organ enjoyment and sexual prowess into the feminine jouissance that is close to mysterious religious experience (the Shakers).⁴⁸ The female subject feels enjoyment in this "game" of transformation, and "sweet", by way of synesthesia, indicates an experience of (feminine) jouissance beyond specific organ. As the dancing rhythms linked to the Shakers, "cha cha" and "cha cha cha" throughout almost all line endings, apparently coincide with the inner rhythms of the female subject in this poem.

The demonstration of feminine jouissance and of the sarcasm of phallic jouissance is not only reflected in "Certain Pas de Deux," but can be seen in Xia Yu's whole oeuvre. If "Certain Pas de Deux" portrays sexual action without any verbalized sexual organ or sexual behavior, Xia Yu casually throws out such vulgar word as "masturbation" "copulating" "piss" and "groins" in her poem "Afternoon Tea" without intending to portray sex:

after collective masturbation a row of them
sitting there reading the newspaper headlines each
evening spiders piss at the corners of their drooling mouths cockroaches
crawl over their copulating bodies laying eggs on naked
groins you know why we're headed for extinction?
I dreamed of a dinosaur with a scornful voice
interrogating me that's just what you're always talking about that
collective sense of failure⁴⁹

The first to notice is most likely the incongruity between the graceful title "Afternoon Tea" and the offensive words in the main text. The romantic and elegant ambience suggested by the word "Afternoon Tea" is swept away, or, the expected harmonious communication between the two sexes is replaced by the dirty scene related to the male character alone. The poem can certainly be seen as portraying "masturbatory" phallic jouissance (even intercourse is masturbation through other's body), while such words/phrases "a row," "their drooling mouths," "we're headed for extinction," "collective" imply the male as a group. The masturbatory behavior determines the

⁴⁷ Lin Qingxuan, *Yuanyang xianglu* (Taipei: Jiuge, 1983), 246-247.

⁴⁸ Chen Boling, when discussing about Xia Yu's "aesthetics of enjoyment," also states "I always feel ecstasy and shudder" (Chen Boling, "faxiao de shi: lun Xia Yu shi wenben de kuaigan meixue," *Yunhan xuekan* 10, 78). What it means here is that ecstasy and shudder are the basic characteristics of enjoyment in Xia Yu's poetry. As a writing or reading experience, it transcends the narrow phallic jouissance.

⁴⁹ Michelle Yeh and N. G. D. Malmqvist, *Frontier Taiwan: An Anthology of Modern Chinese Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 409.

narcissistic and imaginary status of phallic jouissance. The image of the dinosaur matches the erect shape of the phallus with its huge body on the one hand, and insinuates the castrated characteristic of the imaginary phallus (marked as $-\phi$ by Lacan) with the fact of its extinction. That is to say, the function of the phallus is ultimately that of castration, which means “the symbolic lack of the imaginary phallus.”⁵⁰ It is depressing, nonetheless, that even symbolization is not the result of final solution. Spiders and cockroaches are both (several-billion-year-old) ancient animals contemporary of dinosaurs, and can be conceived as real transformation during the process of symbolization of the imaginary dinosaur – atrophy, abjection, incapacity. The residue of the Real from symbolization must be seen retroactively to attain its meaning. In any case, the dinosaur which represents the male even “interrogat[es]” the other person “with a scornful voice” to talk about his own “sense of failure.” As Lacan hints, phallic jouissance is not only masturbatory, but also idiotic.⁵¹

As a representative “erotic” poet, Yan Ailin is well-known for advocating female dominance between two genders. Her poetry includes expressions that directly expose absurd phallic jouissance, such as “some men use empty coke bottle / to masturbate and ejaculate”⁵² (“Marilyn Monroe”), but does not always show radically negative male images. Her poem “Beast,” for example, is a positive demonstration of phallic jouissance: the phallus as organ occupies the central status, or, one might say it is the feminine jouissance based on imaginary phallus (“it has digested me...”⁵³). Yan's poem “The Moon at the Time of Sex” is considered having completely turned the sexual statuses of man and woman upside down: it “portrays woman's lust for passion, expresses woman's active consciousness to seek sex and enjoy sex, and presents the possibility of thinking woman's detachment from passive to subvert the logic of binary opposition”⁵⁴:

The filthy and obscene moon has risen.
After inhaling all the sun's quintessential light, breath and color
She, with her waning moon

Smiling,
Licks clouds

⁵⁰ Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), p. 88.

⁵¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), p.81.

⁵² Yan Ailin, *Gu pi rou* (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1997), 50.

⁵³ Yan Ailin, *Gu pi rou* (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1997), 28.

⁵⁴ Yan Xiufang, “Yan Ailin’s ‘Yinshi zhi yue’” (<http://www.wretch.cc/blog/yenhsiufang/11603770>). Interestingly, this conclusive statement is deleted in Yan Xiufang’s monograph *Zhanhou Taiwan qingseshi yanjiu (1950-2010)*.

Licks the erect building
Licks the upright mount;

With her seductive lip hook
Provokes all the phallus' nostalgia.⁵⁵

Saying "With her seductive lip hook / Provokes all the phallus' nostalgia" means that the phallus is no longer the central signifier, but is constructed only when confronting the female object as the cause of desire, and exposes its nostalgic trait, as an essentially lacking and desiring signifier. The *jouissance* of the Other of lack is marked by Lacan as $J(\bar{A})$ – i.e., *jouissance* of the barred Other: "If phallic *jouissance* (of the object *a*) makes the symbolic One, increasingly pre-tending to obliterate the lack, on the other hand, $J(\bar{A})$, which also enjoys the object *a*, makes the individual who, as it were, develops "his own" Symbolic *from* that lack."⁵⁶ In other words, *jouissance* of the barred Other, while enjoying, reveals the fundamental void of the big Other, or Symbolic law. In this sense, like Xia Yu, Yan Ailin perceives the incompatible relation between male and female sexual manners, but she does not endow man with negative characteristics. There is no ideal sexual intercourse really happening in this poem.⁵⁷ On the contrary, the woman only "seduces" and "provokes," without the goal of phallic *jouissance*, while the man, whose goal is phallic *jouissance*, is suspending in the predicament of "nostalgia" due to the lack of the object. This "nostalgia" certainly coincides with Lacan's description of the phallus as desire: "This seals the conjunction of desire, insofar as the phallic signifier is its mark, with the threat of or nostalgia based on not-having [*manque à avoir*]"⁵⁸.

In a sense, the barred Other is isomorphic to the phallus as lack, which appears in various forms. In Yan's poem "Phallus Belongs to the Feminine," the male organ is portrayed as an incapable, "mushy" and "head slumped down" thing:

A woman's phallus
is never with her body.
The mushy plaything like a piece of
small intestine; crestfallen before her
bowing and saluting.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Yan Ailin, *Gu pi rou* (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1997), 38.

⁵⁶ Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), p. 188.

⁵⁷ Indeed, some of Yan Ailin's poems, including "Ai shi Sijiaoshou" and "Dudong de qingshou," metaphorically portrays actual scenes of sexual intercourse.

⁵⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 582.

⁵⁹ Yan Ailin, *Tafang* (Taipei: Lianjing, 2004), 137.

According to this logic, since it belongs to woman, only woman can activate it.
“When the phallus deeply wedges in” the woman,

She is satisfied at once,
yet incomparably empty.
The phallus is not her ceremonial utensil
but her nirvana.⁶⁰

Here Yan Ailin seems to touch upon the dialectics of satisfaction and emptiness. The holy sublimity of “ceremonial utensil” is denied, or, the phallic symbol Φ appears in the form of *a* which, as a signifier of lacking *jouissance*, truly shows its mysterious engrossment in feminine *jouissance* only in the circumstance of nirvana. In other words, it is not phallic *jouissance*’s obsession with “having,” but feminine *jouissance*’s experience of “not-having” or “nothingness.”

Symptom as *Sinthome*: *Père-Jouissance* in Tang Juan’s Poetry

In his Seminar 23, entitled *Le sinthome* (1975-76), Lacan elucidates the concept *sinthome*, an olden spelling of the French *symptôme* (symptom) containing several different implications such as saint home, synth-homme and Saint Thomas. For Lacan, *sinthome* is also an example of *jouis-sens*, an enjoyment persisting in language but not engendering meaning (on the contrary, it is to be seen as a signifier that loses signified). Seminar 23 mainly discusses how the concept *sinthome* can be applied to James Joyce’s works. Lacan considers Joyce a master of literary magic, whose novel *Finnegans Wake* is full of mutable, riddled words: transformed, punned, ambiguous... According to Lacan, such an unreadable work is a result of Joyce’s loss of paternal care during his childhood, a compensation for the lack of Father. Facing the empty space of the Name-of-the-Father, Joyce has to occupy the Symbolic position with his individualized subjective enjoyment in the art of language so as to avoid the consequence of psychosis. If the symbolic Father represents language form, Joyce's lifelong struggle with language demonstrates the forced intrusion of language into substance, or the pure enjoyment of language per se – a meaningless enjoyment – that is to say, the part of the Real not covered by the Symbolic excludes meaning. This is then Joyce's *sinthome*, containing both illusory imagination and ghostly spiritual abyss in the realm of language.

⁶⁰ Yan Ailin, *Tafang* (Taipei: Lianjing, 2004), 138.

In Tan Juan's writing, father has extraordinary influence, too. If, for Joyce, the lack of father means the destitution of fatherly love, Tang Juan's father withdraws from the Symbolic authority with his illness and weakness. In his prose essays, Tang Juan has ample and detailed records of his father's illness, for example: "Sleepless and turning over and over, he sometimes coughed continuously and sometimes spat phlegm with his bent body."⁶¹ In addition, Tang Juan also portrays pictures of bodily damage related to the disease: "In my mind there always looms an X-ray film, which showed a pair of fragmented lungs, as if several transparent worms were wriggling inside. With an age equivalent to mine, the worms had been biting my father's life ceaselessly."⁶² Obviously, Tang Juan's understanding of father focuses on the scope of disease and contamination, and he himself is metaphorically associated with the worms in his father's ill lungs. His association with his father is also conceived as contagion, as in the poem "Heredity":

When my head is stuffed into father's hat
Vines climb up my cranial nerves
Father's soul is like a kind of mould
That grows and fills my damp six indriyas⁶³

In this passage, the concrete image of the father is lacking. Being a vacant and nominal existence, the father produces only symbolic function. The hat, a metonymy of father, represents a predominant vacant position which, though without entity, is a blank that the subject strives to occupy or fill in. While the soul is father's, the head is "mine."

But this father short of flesh brings about all bodily disturbances and sicknesses, and perfectly embodies surplus jouissance endowed by the obscene big Other. The sicknesses, in a way close to botanic creep and growth, occupy "my" brain – the shape of cranial nerves approaches that of the vines and is redolent of that of entangled genealogical tree.

As regards father's illness, Lu Xun, who greatly influences Tang Juan, is the author of "Father's Illness," a short memoir in which the description of father and his illness can be compared with Tang Juan's, as both Lu Xun and Tang Juan show multifaceted and ambivalent attitude toward father. Of course, the fundamental distinction between the two must not be ignored. Lu Xun's (Freudian) Oedipus complex is apparently

⁶¹ Tang Juan, *Daguimo de chenmo* (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 1999), 107.

⁶² Tang Juan, *Daguimo de chenmo* (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue, 1999), 76.

⁶³ Tang Juan, *Anzhong* (Gaoxiong: Gaoshi wenhua, 1999), 138.

revealed in his narrative of his thought before his father's deathbed: "Sometimes the thought flashed into my mind, 'Better if it could all be over quickly....' At once I knew I should not think of such a thing, in fact I felt guilty."⁶⁴ Tang Juan's (Lacanian) subject, however, seeks excessive identification with the sickness in the Name-of-the-Father. If Lu Xun's potential inclination toward patricide symbolizes his modernist break from the traditional China (an effort to enter the Symbolic through challenge), Tang Juan's subject of *jouissance*, then, may well be a postmodern incarnation and disenchantment of personal and social convention.

This surplus *jouissance* is what Lacan calls *père-jouissance*, indicating that the function performed by the big Other is not purely morality and justice but rather excessive, obscene *objet petit a*. The "mould" of father's soul becomes "my damp six indriyas" – "my" identification with the big Other becomes the subject's identification with *père-jouissance*. What can be compared between father to Tang Juan and father to Joyce? Joyce attempts to fill in the vacancy left by father with *jouissance* of language to identify with the lack in *objet a* behind the Name-of-the-Father, while Tang Juan directly identifies in his poetry with *jouissance* represented by father, or, the *jouissance* as the loss of Symbolic phallus. In his essay "Someone Is Spat out by the Home Door," Tang Juan records how he, as a child, accidentally found a photo of his father with a strange woman, both naked: "...then a photo. As I lighted the crestfallen candle to look closely, a man and a woman, two yellowish nudes, loomed from the gloomy background. The woman was definitely a stranger, and the man with obscene and murky smile, under scrutiny, is none other than the young father, not yet bearded."⁶⁵ Two comments can be made regarding this passage to see the shock this event brought to Tang Juan. In his original text, Tang Juan uses "liangju...luoti" (兩具.....裸體) to refer to the two naked bodies on the photo. As the measure word *ju* is usually used for corpses, we can detect a sense of loathing in such expression. Another unusual usage is the word "yinhui" (淫晦, obscene and murky), an invented word obviously for avoiding "yinhui" (淫穢, obscene and filthy), since, semantically, it cannot be "yinhui" (隱晦, hidden and murky) or "yinhui" (陰晦, dark and murky). The neurotic subject in the poem is derived from the particular indication of the father image. As Žižek states:

neurosis always involves a perturbed, traumatic, relationship to the father: in neurosis, the "sublation" of the Father-Enjoyment into the paternal Name fails, the figure of the Father remains marked with a traumatic stain of *jouissance*, and one of the traumatic scenes that

⁶⁴ Lu Xun, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976), 67.

⁶⁵ Tang Juan, *Daguimo de chenmo* (Taipei: Lianhe wenzue, 1999), 110.

brings such a distasteful *jouissance* to the neurotic is the scene of the father either caught "with his pants down" (i.e., in an act of excessive, obscene enjoyment), or being humiliated (in both cases, the father is not "at the level of his symbolic mandate").⁶⁶

In Tang Juan, the father image can no longer be sublated into the big Other, but disclosed as *objet a*, residue of the Real not integrated into the Symbolic order, "with a traumatic stain of *jouissance*." We can, from this point, explore why Tang Juan's poetry is conspicuously scatophilic, as in the poem entitled the same as the essay quoted above, "Someone Is Spat out by the Home Door":

Someone is spat out by the home door, sticky
and chilly, like phlegm.

.....

The home door is rusty, like the constipated
anus, unable to excrete the crammed anger⁶⁷

In a sense, writing about the home door is tightly linked to writing about *père-jouissance*. The word "home door" (家門) is metaphorically associated with "family tradition" (家風 or 門風), and the symbol of "home" is inseparable from the role of father. The home as symbolic order gives way to its own contamination by the traumatic *jouissance*. The crevice between father's phlegm as *objet a* (stain of the Real remaining in the Symbolic) and the Name-of-the-Father as the Symbolic Other is precisely what Tang Juan intends to expose. The image of the home door also recurs in his other poems, often associated with vulgarized male organ (rather than sublimated phallic signifier):

Catastrophe in the future soul flying away and scattering the home door like a scar
Disclosed by a rude hand fictitious happiness squeezed out
You and your genitals the spirit tablet deposit slips squeezed out
Like sticky pus you slide toward ditch and neighborhood catastrophe in the future
Everyone disquieted you feed the electronic wife with semen properties
Holding the conduct grade form you ride to the neon-glittering west⁶⁸

In this poem, entitled "The Wandering Immortal," the lyrical subject is faced with a traumatic picture of "catastrophe in the future soul flying away and scattering,"

⁶⁶ Slavoj Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects," in Slavoj Žižek ed., *Cogito and the Unconscious* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 98.

⁶⁷ Tang Juan, *Anzhong* (Gaoxiong: Gaoshi wenhua, 1999), 237-238.

⁶⁸ Tang Juan, *Wuxue de dalu* (Taipei: Baoping, 2002), 35.

while the home door is filled by such filthy images a "rude," "scar," "genitals," "sticky pus," "ditch," "semen," etc. The word "genitals" is especially noticeable as it is "squeezed out" along with "fictitious happiness," "the spirit tablet" "deposit slip" – if "deposit slip" indicates worldly material life, "fictitious happiness" refers to family life, then "the spirit tablet" implies the symbolic position of the dead father, which marks the nominal big Other but is placed in a sick and chaotic situation to become a self-deconstructed symbol. We often detect, in Tang Juan's representation of the father image, surreal and nightmarish scene in which icons or sceneries transform into bugs:

My father was a tree
On the tree coughs had grown ripe
Every cough had reddish peel
Hard nut, and lean pulp
I would like to pluck one to eat
But I picked an ant nest
And the ants entered my body through pores
To rebuild a nest in my left chest⁶⁹
("Shade")

The image of braches and leaves recurs, and the erect big tree is full of sick fruits: "coughs" and "ant nest" are exposed as heterogeneities in the grand symbolic structure of the tree. Disease ("coughs") and the corrupted body ("left chest" where ants nest and "pores" penetrated by ants) become somatic trauma which fuses with the sickness of *père-jouissance*. This passage shows again the ambivalent attitude toward father: the lyrical subject longed for ("I would like to pluck one to eat") the big tree and its fruits ("coughs") but encountered "ant nest," and it is precisely the ants from the nest that entered "my" body to rebuild their nest inside – that is to say, they were inherited from the father's big tree to "my" body. Ant is a unique metaphor which suggests filth, dark and inferiority, and hints at itch rather than pain, containing complex and multilayered implications. In any case, "ants" or "ant nest" represent the kernel (fruit) of *jouissance* left by father, and Tang Juan's poetry constructs the impossible, traumatic *père-jouissance* into language game, in order to evade the devour of the Real by identifying directly with the *sinthome* – i.e., the *jouissance* experience as meaning.

In Tang Juan's poetry, the solemn big Other always falls into smutty circumstances. Even if in passages unrelated to father, it is still perceivable that Tang Juan's interest

⁶⁹ Tang Juan, *Anzhong* (Gaoxiong: Gaoshi wenhua, 1999), 203-204.

in filth is inseparable from the grand ideas, as in this "Life and Ethics and Lunchbox":

"we should model after gr... great..." yolk
yolk is stroking white rice
the swing outside the window sways along with imagination
while dream and reality sit at the two ends of the zigzag
great? I surmise how, how the great
is a marvelous physiological phenomenon and the wish to urinate is filling
my bladder. The toilet is three step away from
and left to the front door, and the sublime
is Mount Ali, three thousand meters above sea level
[...]

"we should
model after... we should" disenjoyment
disenjoyment fills up my little bladder.⁷⁰

Here, the phrase "model after" (literally, *xiaofa*, imitate the law) implies the quality of "law" in the signifier of "great," while the word "great" can only be uttered in a stuttering way – "gr... great..." – evidencing that the great has, in speech disorder, lost its infinite power. "Disenjoyment" is in fact an intrinsic characteristic of *jouissance* (enjoyment), coming not only from "the wish to urinate is filling / my bladder" but even from the interrogation "how, how the great / is a marvelous physiological phenomenon." Therefore, what is more significant here is that Tang Juan discloses the other side of the "great" and shows the partial drive that the "great" we "model after" is unable to conceal: the erogenous zone covered by "bladder" and "wish to urinate" so unstoppably performs *jouissance* in a gesture of "filling up" – it is both the base and the loss of *jouissance*. Here, the articulation of urination system is reminiscent of Freud's rereading of the Prometheus myth when he discusses the partial drive. In "The Acquisition and Control of Fire," Freud believes this heroic legend is actually a story about urethra drive, about human control of fire, becoming a legend through repressing the drive to put off fire by urinating. Freud sees male genital organ having double functions of "evacuation of the bladder" and "act of love which sets the craving for the genital libido at rest" but not able to perform them simultaneously: "The antithesis between the two" means "that man quenches his own fire with his own water."⁷¹ Compared to Chen Li, Jiao Tong, Xia Yu, Yang Lian, Jiang Wenyu, Chen Kehua, Yan Ailin, etc., Tang Juan develops and explores the

⁷⁰ Tang Juan, *Anzhong* (Gaoxiong: Gaoshi wenhua, 1999), 118-119.

⁷¹ Freud, "The Acquisition and Control of Fire," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 22, pp. 192-193.

writing of disease, filth and other marginal spaces of the body, related closely to the multiple implications of *père-jouissance*.